United Nations A/70/PV.3

General Assembly
Seventieth session

Official Records

3rd plenary meeting
Friday, 25 September 2015, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lykketoft ..... (Denmark)

The meeting was called to order at 9.45 a.m.

Address by His Holiness Pope Francis

Pope Francis was escorted into the General Assembly Hall by the President and the Secretary-General.

The President: This morning we shall hear an address by His Holiness Pope Francis of the Observer State of the Holy See on the occasion of his visit to the United Nations.

It is my great honour to welcome Pope Francis — Bishop of Rome, Head of the Roman Catholic Church and defender of the dignity of humankind and the life-support systems of our planet — to the General Assembly.

When he has previously recalled how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and peace, he has spoken directly to the three pillars of the United Nations and the interdependency and interconnectedness of those three pillars. That is the message at the heart of the new and very ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which we confront the injustices of poverty, marginalization and discrimination. We recognize the need to reduce inequalities and protect our common home by changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. We identify the overwhelming need to address the politics of division, corruption and irresponsibility that fuel conflict and hold back development.

As His Holiness has stated, we are indeed united by the same concern. In two months' time, at the climate conference in Paris, that unity will be tested. We can and we must find the wisdom and courage to adopt an ambitious climate agreement to protect people and planet. Similar urgency and unity are required to bring an end to the conflicts and violent extremism affecting many parts of the world today.

To date, our collective response to the crisis and to the plight of millions of displaced people and refugees has been at best inadequate and at worst a failure of our humanity. The need for this great Hall to address these crises with leadership and action in the spirit of solidarity, dialogue and tolerance cannot be overstated. Therefore, we are greatly looking forward to hearing His Holiness' address to the General Assembly. I welcome him once again.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General (*spoke in Spanish*): I welcome His Holiness to the United Nations. It is an honour for us to be his hosts for this historic visit.

(*spoke in English*)

For those of us who cherish the United Nations, this Hall is sacred space. In no other hall — from no other platform — can a world leader speak to all humankind. And for decades, that is precisely what world leaders — kings and queens, presidents, prime ministers, ministers and popes — have done. But never in our 70-year history has the United Nations been honoured to welcome a Pope for the opening of the General Assembly, and never in papal history has the

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

15-29143 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

Head of the Catholic Church addressed such an array of world leaders.

I thank His Holiness for making history. I thank him for demonstrating yet again his remarkable global stature as a man of faith for all faiths. His motto is *miserando atque eligendo*, or "lowly but chosen". And he strives every day to include the excluded. He is at home not in palaces but among the poor; not with the famous but with the forgotten; not in official portraits, but in selfies with young people.

Like the United Nations, he is driven by a passion to help others. His views move millions. His teachings bring action. His example inspires us all. His visit today coincides with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. But that is no coincidence. He has often spoken of an integral ecology that encompasses the environment, economic growth, social justice and human well-being; in other words, sustainable development for our common home.

The recent papal encyclical — *Laudato si'* — defines climate change as a principal challenge facing humankind and a moral issue. This message is critical as we approach the pivotal climate change conference in Paris in December.

Across the global agenda, His Holiness is a resounding voice of conscience. He has cried out for compassion for the world's refugees and migrants and for solidarity with people trapped in conflict and poverty. He is committed to lifting up struggling families and shutting down modern-day slavery. He believes in building roads of opportunity for young people and bridges between communities.

In May 2014, Pope Francis met with the full leadership of the United Nations system at the Vatican. He affirmed that we must mobilize the world beyond religious or political differences to forge a shared vision — a life of dignity for all. On the first page of his recent encyclical, Pope Francis said, "I wish to address every person living on this planet".

I welcome His Holiness to the pulpit of the world. We are here to listen.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I once again wholeheartedly welcome His Holiness Pope Francis to this Hall and now invite him to address the Assembly.

Pope Francis (*spoke in Spanish*): Once again, following a tradition by which I feel honoured, the Secretary-General has invited the Pope to address this assembly of nations. In my own name and that of the entire Catholic community, I wish to express to Mr. Ban Ki-moon my most sincere and heartfelt gratitude and thank him for his kind words. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Heads of State and Government here today, to the ambassadors and diplomats and the political and technical officials accompanying them, as well as to the staff of the United Nations working for the General Assembly at its seventieth session, those involved in all the Organization's programmes and agencies, and all those who in one way or another are participating in this meeting. And through them I would also like to greet the citizens of every nation represented in this Hall. I am grateful for the efforts of each and every one to benefit humankind.

This is the fifth time that a Pope has visited the United Nations. I follow my predecessors Pope Paul VI, in 1965, Pope John Paul II, in 1979 and 1995, and, most recently, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in 2008. They all expressed their profound esteem for the Organization, which they considered to be the appropriate juridical and political response to this moment in history, which has been marked by our technical ability to overcome distances and frontiers and, it seems, any natural limit to the exercise of power. It is an essential response, inasmuch as technological power in the hands of nationalistic or falsely universalist ideologies is capable of perpetrating terrible atrocities. I can only reiterate the appreciation expressed by my predecessors by reaffirming the importance that the Catholic Church attaches to this institution and the hopes that its activities inspire.

The story of the organized community of States represented by the United Nations, which is now celebrating its seventieth anniversary, is one of significant shared successes in a time of unusually rapid change. To mention just a few, they include the codification and development of international law, the establishment of international standards of human rights, improvements in humanitarian law, the settling of many conflicts, peacekeeping operations and reconciliations, and any number of other achievements in every area of international activity and endeavour. All of these are lights that can banish the darkness of the disorder that results from unrestrained ambitions and collective selfishness. We can be sure that while many serious problems are still unresolved, it is clear that without all those international actions, humankind could not have survived the unchecked exploitation

of its own potential. Each of those political, juridical and technical advances is a path towards attaining the ideal of human brotherhood and a way of achieving its greater realization.

That is why I would like to pay homage to all the men and women who have served humankind with loyalty and self-sacrifice in the past 70 years. I would especially like to recall today those who have given their lives for peace and reconciliation among peoples, from Dag Hammarskjöld to the many United Nations officials at every level who have fallen in the course of humanitarian missions and those of peace and reconciliation.

But far beyond those achievements, the experience of the past 70 years has shown that reform and adaptation to the times are always essential as we work towards the ultimate goal of ensuring that all countries without exception can participate in our decisions and have a genuine and equitable influence on them. The need for greater equity is especially true in the case of bodies that have an executive capability, such as the Security Council, the financial institutions and those groups and mechanisms specifically created to deal with economic crisis. It can help to limit any kind of abuse or usury, especially where developing countries are concerned. The international financial institutions should work to help countries achieve sustainable development and ensure that they are not subjected to oppressive lending systems that, far from promoting progress, subject people to mechanisms that result in greater poverty, exclusion and dependence.

The work of the United Nations, according to the principles set forth in the Preamble and first Articles of its founding Charter, can be seen as the development and promotion of the rule of law in the understanding that justice is an essential condition for achieving the ideal of universal brotherhood. In that context, we should recall that the limitation of power is an idea implicit in the very concept of law. Giving to each his own, to cite the classic definition of justice, means that no individual or group can consider themselves omnipotent, permitted to trample on the dignity and rights of other individuals or social groups. The practical distribution of power, whether political, economic, defence-related or technological, among a plurality of citizens, and the creation of a juridical system for regulating claims and interests, is one concrete way of limiting power.

Yet today's world presents us with many false rights and, at the same time, broad sectors which are vulnerable, victims of the misuse of power: the natural environment and the vast ranks of men and women who are excluded. These sectors are closely interconnected and made increasingly fragile by the dominant political and economic relationships. That is why their rights must be forcefully affirmed by working to protect the environment and by putting an end to exclusion.

First, it must be stated that a true "right of the environment" does exist, for two reasons. The first is that we human beings are part of the environment. We live in communion with it, since the environment itself entails ethical limits that human activity must acknowledge and respect. Man, for all his remarkable gifts, which are signs of a uniqueness that transcends the spheres of physics and biology, is at the same time a part of these spheres. He possesses a body shaped by physical, chemical and biological elements, and can survive and develop only if the ecological environment is favourable. Any harm done to the environment, therefore, is harm done to humankind.

Secondly, all of creation — particularly living beings — has intrinsic value in its existence, its life, its beauty and the interdependence among creatures. We Christians, together with the other monotheistic religions, believe that the universe is the fruit of a loving decision by the Creator, who permits man respectfully to use creation for the good of his fellow men and for the glory of the Creator; he is not authorized to abuse it, much less destroy it. In all religions, the environment is a fundamental good.

The misuse and destruction of the environment are also accompanied by a relentless process of exclusion. In effect, a selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity leads both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and the disadvantaged, either because they are differently abled — handicapped — or because they lack adequate information and technical expertise, or lack the capacity for decisive political action. Economic and social exclusion represents a complete denial of human fraternity and a very grave offence against human rights and the environment. The poorest are those who suffer most from such offences, for three serious reasons: they are cast off by society, forced to live off what is discarded, and suffer unjustly from the consequences of the abuse of the environment. These phenomena are part of today's widespread and quietly growing culture of waste.

The dramatic reality of this whole situation of exclusion and inequality, with its evident effects, has led me, in union with the entire Christian people and many others, to take stock also of my grave responsibility in this regard and to speak out, together with all those who are seeking urgently needed and effective solutions. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the world summit that opens today is an important sign of hope. I am similarly confident that the Paris Conference on Climatic Change will secure fundamental and effective agreements.

Solemn commitments, however, are not enough, even though they are a necessary step towards solutions. The classic definition of justice that I mentioned earlier contains as one of its essential elements a constant and perpetual will: *Iustitia est constans et perpetua voluntas ius sum cuique tribuendi* — "Justice is the constant and perpetual desire to give to each that to which he is entitled".

Our world demands of all Government leaders a will that is effective, practical and constant, with concrete steps and immediate measures for preserving and improving the natural environment and thus putting an end as quickly as possible to the phenomenon of social and economic exclusion, with its baneful consequences of human trafficking, the marketing of human organs and tissues, the sexual exploitation of boys and girls, slave labour, including prostitution, the drug and weapons trade, terrorism and international organized crime. The magnitude of these situations and their toll in innocent lives is such that we must avoid every temptation to fall into a declarationist nominalism which would only assuage our own consciences.

We need to ensure that our institutions are truly effective in the struggle against all these scourges. The number and complexity of the problems require that we possess technical instruments of verification. But this involves two risks. We can rest content with the bureaucratic exercise of drawing up long lists of good proposals — goals, objectives and statistical indicators — or we can think that a single theoretical and aprioristic solution will provide an answer to all the challenges. It must never be forgotten that political and economic activity is only effective when it is understood as a prudential activity, guided by a perennial concept of justice and constantly conscious of the fact that, above and beyond our plans and programmes, we are dealing with real men and women, just like the Government leaders, who live, struggle and suffer, and are often forced to live in great poverty, deprived of all rights.

To enable these real men and women to escape from extreme poverty, we must allow them to be dignified agents of their own destiny. Integral human development and the full exercise of human dignity cannot be imposed. They must be built up and allowed to unfold for each individual, for every family, in communion with others, and in a right relationship with all those areas in which human social life develops — friends, communities, towns and cities, schools, businesses and unions, provinces and nations. This presupposes and requires the right to education — also for girls, who are excluded in certain places — which is ensured first and foremost by respecting and reinforcing the primary right of the family to educate its children, as well as the right of churches and social groups to support and assist families in the education of their boys and girls. Education conceived in this way is the basis for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for reclaiming the environment.

At the same time, Government leaders must do everything possible to ensure that all can have the minimum spiritual and material means needed to live in dignity and to create and support a family, which is the primary cell of any social development. In practical terms, this absolute minimum has three names — lodging, labour and land — and one spiritual name: spiritual freedom, which includes religious freedom, the right to education and all other civil rights.

For all this, the simplest and best measure and indicator of the implementation of the new agenda for development will be effective, practical and immediate access, on the part of all, to essential material and spiritual goods: housing, dignified and properly remunerated employment, adequate food and drinking water, religious freedom and, more generally, spiritual freedom and education. These pillars of integral human development have a common foundation, which is the right to life and, more generally, what we could call the right to existence of human nature itself.

The ecological crisis and the large-scale destruction of biodiversity can threaten the very existence of the human species. The baneful consequences of an irresponsible mismanagement of the global economy, guided only by the ambition for wealth and power, must serve as a summons to a forthright reflection on man. Man is not only a freedom which he creates for himself.

Man does not create himself. He is spirit and will, but also nature. Creation is compromised where we ourselves have the final word. The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any instance above ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves. Consequently, the defence of the environment and the fight against exclusion demand that we recognize a moral law written into human nature itself, which includes the natural difference between man and woman and an absolute respect for life in all its stages and dimensions.

Without the recognition of certain incontestable natural ethical limits and without the immediate implementation of those pillars of integral human development, the ideal of saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war and promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom risks becoming an unattainable illusion or, even worse, idle chatter that serves as a cover for all kinds of abuse and corruption or for carrying out an ideological colonization by the imposition of anomalous models and lifestyles which are alien to people's identity and, in the end, irresponsible.

War is the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment. If we want true integral human development for all, we must work tirelessly to avoid war between nations and between peoples. To this end, there is a need to ensure the uncontested rule of law and tireless recourse to negotiation, good offices and arbitration, as proposed by the Charter of the United Nations, which constitutes truly a fundamental juridical norm. The experience of the 70 years of existence of the United Nations generally, and that of the first 15 years of the third millennium in particular, demonstrates how effective international standards can be when they are fully applied and how ineffective when they are not. When the Charter of the United Nations is respected and implemented with transparency and sincerity and without ulterior motives, as an obligatory point of reference for justice and not as a tool for concealing false intentions, peace can result. On the other hand, when a standard is seen simply as an instrument to be used when it produces the right results and to be avoided when it does not, we open a real Pandora's box of uncontrollable forces that do serious harm to defenceless populations and to our cultural and biological environments.

The Preamble and Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations lay the foundations for an international juridical framework of peace, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the development of friendly relations among nations. A vivid contrast to such affirmations and one that in practice negates them is the ever-present tendency to allow arms to proliferate, especially weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear weapons. A system of ethics and laws based on the threat of mutual destruction, and possibly the destruction of all humankind, is a contradiction in terms and an affront to the entire edifice of the United Nations, which would become a group of nations united by fear and distrust. We must work hard for a world free of nuclear weapons by implementing the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in letter and in spirit, until such instruments are totally banned. The recent agreement reached on the nuclear issue in a sensitive region of Asia and the Middle East is proof of the potential of political goodwill and the law, when exercised with sincerity, patience and persistence. I hope that the agreement will be lasting and effective and produce the desired results, with the cooperation of all parties involved.

In that regard, we do not lack for hard evidence of the negative consequences of military and political interventions undertaken without coordination among the members of the international community. And while I wish I did not have to, I must therefore renew my repeated appeals concerning the painful situation in the entire Middle East, North Africa and other African countries where Christians, along with other cultural and ethnic groups, and including those adherents of the majority religion who have no desire to be caught up in the hatred and madness, have been forced to witness the destruction of their places of worship, their cultural and religious heritage and their homes and property, and are faced with the alternatives either of fleeing or of paying with their lives or with enslavement for their devotion to goodness and peace.

Such realities should serve as an urgent call to those charged with the conduct of international affairs to examine their consciences. Real human beings take precedence over partisan interests, however legitimate those may be — and not just in cases of religious and cultural persecution, but in every situation of conflict, such as those in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Libya, South Sudan and the Great Lakes region. Those individual human beings caught up in wars and conflicts are our brothers and sisters, men and women, young and old, boys and girls who weep, suffer and die — human beings who are thrown on the rubbish heap when all we do is make

lists of problems, strategies and arguments. As I said in my letter of 9 August 2014 to the Secretary-General, the most basic understanding of human dignity obliges the international community, particularly through the norms and mechanisms of international law, to do all it can to end and prevent further systematic violence against ethnic and religious minorities and to protect innocent peoples.

Along the same lines, I would like to mention another kind of conflict that is not always so explicit and yet is silently killing millions of people. Many of our societies experience a different kind of war as a result of the drug trade, one that we take for granted and that is feebly combated. By its very nature, drug trafficking is accompanied by trafficking in persons, money laundering, the arms trade, child exploitation and other forms of corruption. That corruption has penetrated into every level of life — social, political, military, artistic and religious — and in many cases has given rise to a parallel structure that threatens the credibility of our institutions.

I began this speech recalling the visits of my predecessors. I would hope that my words will be taken above all as a continuation of the final words of the address of Pope Paul VI; although spoken almost exactly 50 years ago, they remain ever timely:

> "Now the hour for a halt is upon us, a moment of meditation, of reflection, almost of prayer; a moment to think anew of our common origin, our history, our common destiny. Never before has there been such a need for an appeal to the moral conscience of man as there is today ... For the peril comes neither from progress nor from science; on the contrary, properly used, they could resolve many of the grave problems which beset mankind." (*A/PV.1347, para. 45*).

Among other things, human genius, well applied, will surely help to meet the grave challenges of ecological deterioration and of exclusion. As Paul VI said:

> "The real peril is in man, who has at hand ever more powerful instruments, suited as much to destruction as to the highest conquests." (*ibid.*)

The common home of all men and women must continue to rise on the foundations of a right understanding of universal fraternity and respect for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and every woman, the poor, the elderly, children, the infirm, the unborn, the unemployed, the abandoned, those considered disposable because they are considered only as statistics. This common home of all men and women must also be built on the understanding of a certain sacredness of created nature.

Such understanding and respect call for a higher degree of wisdom, one which accepts transcendence, rejects the creation of an all-powerful elite and recognizes that the full meaning of individual and collective life is found in selfless service to others and in the wise and respectful use of creation for the common good. As Paul VI said,

> "the edifice of modern civilization must be built on spiritual principles, which alone can not only support it, but also illuminate and animate it (*ibid., para. 46*).

El Gaucho Martin Fierro, a literary classic in my native land, says:

> "Brothers should stand by each other, because this is the first law; keep a true bond between you always, at every time, because if you fight among yourselves, you will be devoured by those outside."

The contemporary world, which appears to be so connected, is experiencing a growing and steady social fragmentation that places at risk the foundations of social life and consequently leads to battles over conflicting interests.

The present time invites us to give priority to actions that generate new processes in society, so as to bear fruit in the form of significant and positive historical events. We cannot permit ourselves to postpone certain agendas for the future. The future demands of us critical and global decisions in the face of worldwide conflicts that increase the number of the excluded and those in need.

The praiseworthy international juridical framework of the United Nations and of all its activities, like any other human endeavour, can be improved, yet it remains necessary; at the same time, it can be the pledge of a secure and happy future for future generations. And so it will, if the representatives of States can set aside partisan and ideological interests and sincerely strive to serve the common good. I pray to Almighty God that this will be the case, and I assure the Assembly of my support and my prayers, and the support and prayers of all the faithful of the Catholic Church, that this institution, all of its Member States and each of

its officials will always render an effective service to mankind, a service respectful of diversity and capable of bringing out, for the sake of the common good, the best in all people and in every individual.

May God bless you all.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to express, as we have already done by clapping, our deep appreciation to His Holiness Pope Francis for his very important statement, a statement that is a source of reflection and inspiration for all of us.

His Holiness Pope Francis was escorted from the General Assembly Hall by the President and the Secretary-General.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.